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THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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1. Introduction

Of all the canonical gospels, the Gospel of Matthew is the most eschatologically minded. While its fullest treatment of eschatological themes (Matt 24) is based on material drawn from Mark's Gospel, Matthew expands and supplements the Markan account to provide a more extensive vision of end time events. The Markan account spans some thirty-seven verses, and its Lukan counterpart is roughly the same length at thirty-two verses. By contrast, the Matthean parallel encompasses fifty-one verses.¹ Admittedly, some of this expansion is due to the conflation of double tradition material contained in Lk 17.23-24, 26-30, 33-35, 37. However, in the first gospel while the common tradition is evident, this eschatological material is radically rewritten. Thus, the Matthean version bears the redactional hallmarks of the first evangelist. In addition to this source material, Matthew integrates material unique to the first gospel whether this be *Sondergut* tradition or redactional composition.² In particular, Matthew continues the eschatological discourse into the following chapter (Matt 25.1-46) with three thematically related parables. In turn, the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25.1-13), the talents (Matt 25.14-30), and the sheep and the goats (Matt 25.31-46), continue the discussion of eschatological ideas albeit with differing emphases and to varying degrees. This skilful and complex editing reveals the evangelist's particular care in forging this unit of material, and moreover positioning it as the topic addressed by Jesus in his final extended discourse in the first gospel.

Additionally, the first evangelist reveals his eschatological concern in that he is the only one of the canonical gospel writers to use the term *παρουσία*, and he does so to designate the coming of Jesus at the end of the age. Matthew employs the terminology of *παρουσία* on four occasions, all of which occur in Matt 24. In that context this choice of language exemplifies the evangelist's preferential terminology (Matt 24.3, 27, 37, 39). In Matt 24.3 the term is inserted into material that has its source in Mark's Gospel. In Mark, at the beginning of the eschatological discourse the disciples ask Jesus 'what is the sign when all these things are about to be fulfilled', τί τὸ σημεῖον ὅταν μέλλῃ ταῦτα συντελεῖσθαι πάντα; (Mk 13.4b). By contrast, in Matthew's Gospel the disciples ask 'what is the sign of your *parousia*', τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας (Matt. 24:3). Similarly, the other three occurrences of the term *παρουσία* are used in material from the double tradition, but the term does not occur in the Lukan parallels. The Matthean use of *παρουσία* replaces Luke's more generic references to the day, or the days of the Son of Man (Lk 17.24, 26, 30). Thus Matthew pays great attention to his source material, but chooses to rewrite the source material employing the term *παρουσία*. Furthermore, the term occurs both on the lips of disciples (Matt 24.3) and of Jesus (Matt 24. 27, 37, 39).

¹ Matt 24.1-51//Mk 13.1-37//Lk 21.5-36.

² Davies and Allison note the common view that some of the unique material in Matt 24, such as 'vv. 10-12 (scandals, false prophets, cold love), 30a (the sign of the Son of man), 30b (the mourning), as well as the addition of the trumpet v. 31' is due to Matthean redactional composition. However, they demur from this view. Instead they see that the material is drawn from a common source, which stands behind both Matt 24.10-12, 30-31 and Didache 16.3-6. Thus they argue, 'Matthew drew upon a small apocalypse akin to what appears in Did. 16.3-6.' W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. III, commentary on Matthew XIX – XXVIII, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997) 327. Of course, it is also possible that the *Didache* derives this material from the Gospel of Matthew, and thus it might be unnecessary to posit a common source at this point, but instead to retain the possibility of the evangelist's compositional creativity being responsible for this additional material.

When the disciples use the term they ask Jesus about the timing of his coming. When Jesus use the term παρουσία he employs it to designate the coming of the Son of Man at the end of the age. Given the way in which the disciples have introduced the term παρουσία to enquire about Jesus' own coming, it is natural to see Jesus' use of the term when it is applied to the Son of Man as being self-referential.³

Apart from an extended discourse on the final judgment, and the unique use of parousia language among the canonical gospels, also at various points throughout the gospel there are repeated and recurrent references to both the final judgement and the mode of existence that will prevail in the age to come. In relation to the last judgment of the unrighteous, Matthew repeatedly uses the phrase 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt 8.12; 13.42, 52; 22.13; 24.52; 25.30), he speaks of Gehenna as a place of final torment (Matt 5.22, 29, 30; 18.9; [23.15]), and both harvest and fiery judgment are images used in association with the 'end of the age' (Matt 13.39-40, 50; 18.8; 25.41). Alongside these negative aspects of the future judgment, for the righteous Matthew sees them occupying seats at table with Abraham (Matt 8.11), being gathered by the angels with the sound of a trumpet (Matt 24.31), entering into eternal life (Matt 25.46), and enjoying Jesus' presence until the 'end of the age' (Matt 28.20).

Therefore, Matthew repeatedly presents material in the gospel that invites readers to contemplate the end of the temporal horizon. This is portrayed as a time when Jesus will return to dispense justice. That justice is portrayed in dualistic terms, with negative and ultimate consequences for the unrighteous, but with eternal blessings for those deemed to be the righteous followers of Jesus.

2. Eschatology – the Difficulty of Definition

The foregoing introductory discussion has preceded under what might appear to be a false assumption. Namely, that when one mentions the term 'eschatology' there exists a common definition of what the term means, and agreed list of texts in the Gospel of Matthew that can be rightly classified as 'eschatological', in comparison to supposedly 'non-eschatological' material. From the inadequate reference point of semantics, the Greek adjective ἔσχατος primarily means 'last' or 'final', and can be thought of as standing in antithetical relationship to the adjective πρῶτος 'first'. Therefore, Jörg Frey observed that 'Eschatology' can be understood as 'the *logos* of the "Last Things."' ⁴ In this context perhaps *logos* should be glossed as the 'study' or 'understanding' of last things. More than a century earlier, R.H. Charles in his Jowett Lectures of 1898-99 offered a similar, but less circumscribed definition of 'Hebrew, Jewish and Christian eschatology' as 'the teaching of the Old Testament, of Judaism, and of the New Testament on the final condition of man and of the world.' ⁵ Thus, in many respects, the definition of eschatology has changed little from the late nineteenth century down to the present period. In essence, within the Jewish and Christian traditions, it is the study of the perspectives contained in the writings of those traditions on the 'last things', or it focuses

³ Luz takes this identification in the present context as so self-evident, that on a number of occasions he simply refers to 'Son of Man Jesus'. See U. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) see for instance 'the theme of the final discourse is the last judgment of the Son of Man Jesus' (179).

⁴ J. Frey, 'New Testament Eschatology – an Introduction: Classical Issues, Disputed Themes, and Current Perspectives', in Jan G. van der Watt (ed.), *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, WUNT 2.315 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 6.

⁵ R.H. Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life: In Israel, in Judaism, and in Christianity*, or *Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian Eschatology from Pre-Prophetic Times till the Close of the New Testament Canon*, being the First Jowett Lectures delivered in 1898-99, second edition, revised and enlarged (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1913) 1. On the spine of this volume a further title is provided, by which the book is often referenced *Eschatology: Hebrew, Jewish and Christian*.

upon the final condition of the cosmos, or upon the state of being of humanity and the universe at the end of the current temporal spectrum. Due to the unexperienced nature of this final future state, and the lack of ontologically parallels to that state of being, defining eschatology more precisely remains an inherently challenging if not impossible task. Therefore, the study of eschatology is driven back to an analysis of the image-laden portrayals and partial metaphors used in writings in the Jewish and Christian traditions as an attempt to capture the range of eschatological thought and ideas of both of these related movements during the second temple period and at the beginning of the early Christianity.

A further complicating factor is the overlap in such writings between apocalyptic features of such texts and those that might be more narrowly defined as eschatological, in the sense that the latter pertains strictly to the final state or to the last things. However, there is no widely agreed definition of the term 'apocalyptic'. Again, it is possible to adopt a semantic approach, and to see the category is derived from the Greek term ἀποκάλυψις, meaning an 'uncovering', 'unveiling' or 'revealing'.⁶ The tension between the terms 'apocalyptic' and 'eschatological' is brought to the fore by a question J.J. Collins raises in relation to the genre of apocalypses. He asks, 'does an apocalypse always contain apocalyptic eschatology?'⁷ Or to frame the question another way – is it possible to have a non-eschatological apocalypse or alternatively eschatological material that is non-apocalyptic? Collins presents the definition of the apocalyptic genre presented in *Semeia* 14 as a helpful starting point for the classification of Jewish and Christian texts that might belong to an apocalyptic corpus. According to the definition an apocalypse is

A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves the supernatural world.⁸

The Matthean account of Jesus' baptism may be considered as an apocalyptic text. Here there is an opening heaven, similar to the open heaven in Rev 4.1, heavenly intermediaries are present – the Spirit of God in the form of the dove, and a voice from heaven provides the transcendent reality communicated from the supernatural world. This text has the majority of features that would qualify it to be understood as apocalyptic, especially in terms of unveiling or revealing heavenly truths. Yet, this text does not contain any specifically eschatological elements. Therefore, it appears possible to detect apocalyptic texts or traditions that are non-eschatological in nature. This perspective coheres with Rowland's view that in relation to Jewish writings it is necessary not to automatically conflate apocalyptic and eschatological phenomena. Rowland states,

Our study of the relationship between apocalyptic and eschatology has indicated that we are dealing with two separate issues in Jewish religion. The first concerns a way of apprehending the divine will and the second the character of Jewish hopes for the future. They come together precisely because the task of understanding God's will was particularly difficult as far as eschatology was concerned. Consequently it comes as no surprise that a dominant feature of the mysteries revealed to the apocalypticists is the secret of the future, particularly with regard to Israel. To say that, however, is

⁶ BDAG, 'making fully known, *revelation, disclosure*', 112. T. Holtz notes that '[t]he passage which comes nearest to the (rare) pagan usage, which is wholly secular ("uncover something that is hidden"), is Luke 2:35, a passage which also corresponds partially to the usage of the words in the LXX and – significantly – completely to that in Josephus. But even there it is the Messiah, set for a sign, to whom the hidden (evil) thoughts of human being *are to be uncovered*.' T. Holtz, ἀποκάλυψις in H. Balz and G. Schneider (eds), *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990) 130.

⁷ J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 2.

⁸ J.J. Collins (ed.), *Apocalypse: The Morphology of a Genre*, *Semeia* 14 (Atlanta: SBL, 1979).

not the same as saying that eschatology is a constitutive feature of apocalyptic. An apocalypse often does contain much eschatological material, but it need not.⁹

However, it is questionable whether the converse is true. That is the scenario of non-apocalyptic eschatological material, at least in the Jewish and Christian traditions, are difficult to envisage. This is because the end of the age in the eschatological traditions of both religions is understood to be brought about by some level of heavenly intervention. Moreover, since there is involvement from the heavenly sphere or the supernatural world, and that involves disclosure of an otherwise unknowable future or temporal phase that involves a realignment in terms of negative judgment or paradisiacal existence, it is difficult to see how such eschatological portrayals can be anything but apocalyptic in nature.

Therefore, when discussing eschatology in the Gospel of Matthew, or for that matter other early Christian or Second Temple Jewish eschatological texts, one would expect to find these writings as being apocalyptic in nature, since they communicate and reveal transcendent heavenly knowledge. Hence, when discussing the eschatological material in Matthew it is expected that it will display some of the features of the apocalyptic genre. Often, rather than information concerning the last things being communicated by an other-worldly being, it is the earthly Jesus who acts as the one revealing the future events. However, the fact that Jesus is able to purvey heavenly knowledge is perhaps a reflection of the true nature of his identity, and a further insight into Matthew's christological perspective.

Therefore, the understanding adopted here for identifying eschatological material in the Gospel of Matthew is that it must primarily depict or related to perspectives concerning the end of the current temporal age. This may involve the re-appearance of Jesus, that is the *parousia*, or it might include material that depicts the events that precede that return. In many ways, this coheres with Charles' definition that focused on the final condition of humanity and the cosmos.¹⁰ Here, however, the focus is shifted from humanity and the world, to that of the risen Jesus and his future return. The reason for this shift of perspective is simply. Charles cast his study widely to study eschatological traditions in Hebrew, Jewish and Early Christian texts. In those first two corpora of texts, Jesus of course plays no part. By contrast, in the Gospel of Matthew the focus in regard to eschatological events falls less on the human condition, and instead shows more interest in the coming of Jesus at the end of the age.

3. Eschatological Material in the Gospel of Matthew

As has already been mentioned, the key eschatological text in the first gospel is the material contained in Matt 24.1-51. Yet, even here, in this sustained treatment of eschatological themes there is nonetheless a blurring of different temporal perspectives. The discussion is situated by all three synoptic evangelists during the final week of Jesus' life. Some of the subject matter does not pertain to the end of the age, but to events which in comparison with the timeframe of Jesus and his disciples were to take place three to four decades later. However, for the evangelist, events such as the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple are likely to be part of the historical knowledge. However, while this material was already familiar to readers, they are encouraged to see in Jesus' words examples of prophecy already fulfilled. Specifically, with reference to the Temple, Jesus informs his disciples 'truly I say to you, not one stone here shall be left upon another, which will not be torn down' (Matt 25.2). This, therefore, provides a basis for trusting the

⁹ C. Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982) 47-48.

¹⁰ Charles, *A Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, 1.

veracity of Jesus' words in relation to the eschatological predictions which have not yet come to fruition.

Alongside this 'historic' material, are texts that are eschatological in the strict sense of the term. Most obviously, the appearance of the Son of Man in the sky and the gathering of the elect with a trumpet (Matt 24.30-31). These descriptions are presented as events that will transpire at the end of the age. However, within the context of Matthew 24 as a whole, which is spoken in the timeframe of Jesus, all the events including the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (Matt 24.15) and the destruction of the Temple (Matt 24.2) are presented as the precursors to the *parousia* of Jesus. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that Matthew and his readers knew the Temple to have already been destroyed, the evangelist invites readers to read the narrative within Jesus own timeframe and to see this description as one coherent unfolding of a sequence of eschatological events.

3.1 The Preaching of John the Baptist (Matt 3.8, 10-12)

The eschatological concern of Matthew's Gospel begins much earlier than the material in the final discourse. The preaching of John the Baptist, which heralds the ministry of Jesus contains some clearly eschatological perspectives. The warning 'to flee from the wrath to come' (Matt 3.7) is a reference to the future final judgment. As Hagner notes, '[t]his eschatological wrath, associated with fulfillment, is further alluded to in vv 10-12.'¹¹ In those verses, the Baptist is presented as using images of axe and fire to signal the fate of those who fail to repent. In Matt 3.12, the dualist imagery is agricultural in nature, and aligns with wider references to harvest in the gospel as an eschatological metaphor. Here the eschatological actions of the 'coming one' who is mightier than John are depicted through the ingathering images of winnowing and threshing – a process resulting in the separation of grain and chaff. John the Baptist declares the wheat will be gathered into the barn, but the worthless chaff will be cast into an unquenchable fire. Here, future fate is represented in purely binary terms – gathering into the safe-haven of the barn or destruction with fire. However, there is another aspect to 'fire' that the Baptist emphasises and that is its purificatory role. The announcement that the coming one will baptise with the twin instruments of 'the holy spirit and fire' is best understood as two aspects of baptism administered to those who repent, rather than two differentiated types of baptism. The purpose, like the water baptism of John, is to cleanse and purify those who come to repentance. The image of the eschatological fire in Matt 3.12 remains an image of purification, but unlike the baptism with fire it is an image of total destruction, not of the removal of what is bad from those who repent as in Matt 3.11. France discusses the interplay between these nuances of these images. He states,

The verb I have translated as "clear" is more literally "completely clean" or "purify"; in the agricultural imagery it perhaps indicates the threshing floor left bare when all the chaff has been separated off and the grain stored, but metaphorically the verb points to the purpose of God's judgment, the complete removal of all evil leaving a purified people.¹²

Therefore, even prior to the public ministry of Jesus commencing, the eschatological tone of his own preaching and purpose is set by John the Baptist, who describes Jesus as bringing the dualistic judgment with fire. Thus Jesus is not simply present as another herald of the coming eschatological age, instead he is the agent of that age as the one who form a purified people to inhabit the age to come. One group, those willing to repent, will be cleansed through baptism with holy spirit and fire. The second group, who do not

¹¹ D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, WBC 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993) 50.

¹² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 115.

subject themselves to repentance, will be destroyed with fire. The result is a purified people, prepared for the age to come by the actions of the coming one.

3.2 Eschatological Themes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7)

The beatitudes speak of future reversal of fate for those currently down-trodden. As is well-known, Matthew 'spiritualises' the beatitudes – it is not the poor, but the poor in spirit who will receive the kingdom, it is not the hungry who will be satisfied, but those that hunger and thirst for righteousness.¹³ However, while a future reversal is envisaged in the beatitudes, there is little in the context that suggests that such a reversal is envisaged as taking place only at the end of the current age. While the promised possession of the kingdom of heaven in the first and eighth beatitudes could be seen as receiving its fulfilment only at the end of time when the kingdom arrives, it is striking that these two beatitudes, unlike the second to seventh, do not offer a promise in the future tense, but simply state that the poor in spirit (Matt 5.3) and those persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt 5.11) are already in possession of the kingdom, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν (Matt 5.3; cf. 5.10).¹⁴ Therefore, while there are a mix of present and future blessings or reversals, there is little in the context of the beatitudes to suggest that the evangelist is presenting these blessings as coming to fruition specifically at the end of the age. Thus the beatitudes should not be taken as eschatological promises.

Similarly, in the first antithesis on murder (Matt 5.21-26) while the consequence of calling a brother 'fool' μωρό, evokes a punishment with eschatological dimensions, that of being liable 'to the Gehenna of fire' ἐνοχός ἐσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός (Matt 5.22), the focus falls upon the seriousness of using abusive language against a brother rather than the timing of the punishment. Matthew appears to want his readers to apprehend that even seemingly insignificant acts, such as calling somebody a fool, were liable to overwhelming punishment. Davies and Allison note that the selection of Gehenna as the place of punishment functions both in the New Testament and more widely in Jewish literature as 'the place where the wicked dead suffer fiery torments (cf. 1 En. 90.24; 2 Bar 85.13; Rev 19.20; 20.14-15) either immediately after death or after the last judgment.'¹⁵ Consequently, Matthew intensifies the seriousness of these acts of abuse by stating that they result in the same post-mortem punishments as murder. Whether the punishment is envisaged as part of the final eschatological judgment is unclear, and moreover it is not really the concern of this antithesis. Therefore, it is probably best at most to see this reference aligning only in a subsidiary sense with Matthew's larger eschatological perspectives.

Eschatological concerns do come to the fore in the Sermon on the Mount. However, they are more observable towards the end of the discourse. Again the ultimate and dualistic fate of individuals is stated in the 'two-ways saying' (Matt 7.13-14).

¹³ In regard to the addition of 'in spirit' in the first beatitude, Fleddermann notes that '[t]he addition further spiritualizes and interiorizes the first beatitude, shifting the emphasis to detachment.' H.T. Fleddermann, *Q – A Reconstruction and Commentary*, BiTS 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005) 277.

¹⁴ Turner carefully discusses the significance of these present tense promises. He notes, 'the promise statements of 5:3 and 5:10 both use the present tense whereas the promise statements of the intervening verses 4-9 all use the future tense. Scholars debate the significance of the present tense in 5:3, 10. Some opt for the futuristic use of the present (e.g., Gundry 1994: 68; Keener 1999: 166), and others stress the present realization of kingdom blessing (e.g., Carson 1984: 132; Hagner 1993: 92). The latter view of a presently inaugurated kingdom that will be consummated in the future is highly preferable. The oppressed poor presently experience the blessing of the kingdom only partially.' David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 2008) 150.

¹⁵ W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. I Commentary on Matthew I – VII, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988) 514.

Matthew contrasts the wide gate that leads to destruction with the narrow gate that leads to life. The binary opposition between 'destruction' ἀπώλεια and 'life' ζωή pertains to the ultimate fates that await individuals. As Luz observes, '[l]ike "destruction" (ἀπώλεια), "life" (ζωή) is an eschatological term.'¹⁶ Matthew next turns to the occurrence of the phenomenon of false prophets. The evangelist employs the image of the tree not bearing good fruit as a description of the ultimate fate of such false prophets. Like such trees, those false prophets will be 'cut down and thrown into the fire' (Matt 7.19). Here the evangelist aligns the words of judgment spoken by Jesus with those declared earlier by John the Baptist (Matt 3.10). Fire is once again the mechanism for purging the evil that threatens the true followers of Jesus.

The next critique is of those who falsely utter the appellation 'Lord, Lord', but fail to do the will of the father (Matt 7.21). Their defence is that they prophesied, cast out demons, and performed miracles in Jesus' name. The reference to prophesying links this unit (Matt 7.21-23), and the foregoing material that warns against false prophets (Matt 7.15-20). Here, the fate of those who claim the right to address Jesus using the double vocative κύριε κύριε, but are adjudged to be unworthy in their obedience to God is disarmingly stark because of the lack of vivid metaphors. Jesus simply states that he never knew such people, they are to depart from his presence and are labelled as being those 'who practice lawlessness' (Matt 7.23). This condemnation is as absolute as it is stark. They are unknown to Jesus and banished for ever from his presence. Later in the gospel, the phenomenon of false prophets are associated with the end of the age (Matt 24.10-12). That perspective may shape Matthew's thinking here. It may well be that the phenomena of false prophets and the rise of lawlessness are seen as precursors to the end of the age. The view that Matthew considers these events to take place at the end of the age is reinforced by the observation that those who address Jesus as 'Lord, Lord' are said to make their defence of their genuineness at a time that Matthew describes as being 'on that day' ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ (Matt 7.22).¹⁷ Matthew utilises the generalised language of a future day that is commonly associated with the final judgment to locate the time when the false prophets will offer their attempted defence. The Matthean Jesus rejects the attempt at self-justification and sends such people from his presence to their eschatological fate. Thus, at the end of his first extended discourse, the evangelist introduces stark words of warning for his readers. They are to avoid the wide gate and the broad way that leads to destruction, they are to reject false prophets, and they are to see that discipleship entails more than florid christological confessions such as κύριε κύριε (Matt 7.21). Failure to avoid these potential snares is seen as having a heavy eschatological fate, such as leading to destruction (Matt 7.13), or being sent away from the presence of Jesus (Matt 7.23). Hence, for Matthew, correct behaviour has eschatological consequences that lead to life. He motivates his readers by outlining the opposite fate that awaits those whose praxis falls short of Jesus' requirements.

3.3 Reclining with Abraham or Cast into Outer Darkness (Matt 8.11-12)

As the climax to the healing of the centurion's servant, Jesus not only commends the faith of the gentile centurion (Matt 8.10), but he also extracts a more general soteriological observation from this encounter. The Matthean Jesus utters a statement that speaks of gentile inclusion in the eschatological banquet, 'many shall come from east and west and recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven' (Matt 8.11). Allison

¹⁶ U. Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 372.

¹⁷ In regard to the phrase ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ, Nolland simply observes that 'the context gives an eschatological sense.' John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 340 n. 502.

observes that 'according to Matt. 8:11-12, the Gentiles enter the kingdom of God at the end.'¹⁸ This is correct, but perhaps should be nuanced. It is at the end that the gentiles will receive the full blessing of banqueting with the patriarchs in the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, even as Allison also notes the mission to the gentiles starts in the post-Easter period (Matt 28.19).¹⁹ Consequently faithful hearing of the message and baptism in the threefold name constitute true discipleship and thus should be seen at least as providing proleptic entry into the kingdom.

For Matthew, the corollary of gentiles entering the kingdom is that the supposed sons of the kingdom will be cast into outer darkness. This is a vision of the eschatological fate that awaits those who claim physical descent from the patriarchs, but reject the message of Jesus. These sharp words to fellow Jews come about according to Luz because 'Matthew has experienced both Israel's no to Jesus and the destruction of Jerusalem. ... The sons of the kingdom, however, will lose the "Kingdom" (cf. 21:43). Darkness is their fate.'²⁰ Furthermore, Matthew describes the outer darkness as a place where those cast into it will spend their time in 'weeping and gnashing of teeth.' This phrase is a Matthean favourite for depicting the pain and torment of those who are subject to the negative side of the eschatological future (Matt 2.12; 13.42, 50; 22.13; 24.51; 25.30). Not only do the images of the messianic banquet and the weeping and gnashing of teeth in outer darkness form an absolute eschatological and dualistic pair, both images speak of the ongoing nature of the two fates. Whether ideas of eternal punishment are central to Matthew's thought world may be debated. What, however, is certain is that the punishment is protracted and may draw upon knowledge of lengthy torture associated with punishment as regularly practice in the ancient world.

3.4 The Day of Judgment (Matt 10.15; 11.22, 24; 12.36)

Matthew uses the terminology 'in the day of judgment' ἐν ἡμέρᾳ κρίσεως on four occasions (Matt 10.15; 11.22, 24; 12.36) to denote the eschatological reckoning that is to come. While in each of these contexts Matthew is drawing upon source material, the phrase 'in the day of judgment' is not found in those sources. Rather, that language reflects Matthew's introduction of a particular redactional concern using his own favoured phrase to denote the period of future reckoning. Nolland not only states that this phrase is restricted to four texts but also comments that '[t]he phrase is traditional.'²¹ By this, however, he does not mean it is a pre-Matthew gospel tradition, but that the phrase is to be found in the Jewish scriptures.²² Therefore, it is due to the evangelist's handiwork that the phrase is introduced into each of these four contexts.

The first three occurrences are strikingly similar. The Matthean Jesus announces to his hearers that some proverbially named group will fare better on the day of judgment than those who hear the words or see the miracles that Jesus and his disciples perform and fail to repent. In the first instance, the comparison is drawn with Sodom and Gomorrah. The fact that Jesus declares that the punishment of the proverbially evil cities (Gen 19.1-26) will be more tolerable than those who reject the disciples' preaching of the kingdom is the means by which Matthew portrays the intensity of the eschatological judgment on those who reject his message. Likewise, the reproach against Chorazin and Bethsaida for failure to repent is compared to the fate of Tyre and Sidon (cf. Jer 25.22;

¹⁸ D.C. Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come: An Early Interpretation of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 47.

¹⁹ Allison, *The End of the Ages has Come*, 47.

²⁰ U. Luz, *Matthew 8-20, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 11.

²¹ Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 421.

²² Cf. Isa 34.8; 2 Esdr 12.34; 2 Enoch 39.1; Jub. 4.19; Pss. Sol. 15.12.

27.3; 47.4; Joel 3.4; Zech 9.1-4). Again these proverbial targets of judgment oracles are depicted as facing a less horrendous fate at the final judgment than Jesus' contemporary hearers who reject his message. Similar to this rhetoric is the comparison between 'this generation' and the 'men of Nineveh' (Matt 12.41) and the Queen of the South (Matt 12.41) of whom it is stated that both will rise up to condemn 'this generation at the judgment'. Therefore Matthew uses historical comparators to emphasise the severity of the eschatological fate that awaits those who fail to repent in light of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom.

A similar fate is also the lot of those who exhibit certain faulty ethical behaviour. Matthew declares that those who utter careless words will be called upon to give an account of their speech 'on the day of judgment' (Matt 12.36). Once again, this material only occurs in the Gospel of Matthew.²³ This shows Matthew's particular perspective that actions in the present will be judged at the eschaton, especially in regard to response to the message of Jesus and the behaviour that is required in regard to patterns of speech. In the wider context (Matt 12.31-32) the issue is that of blasphemy against the spirit. It may be that the careless words that will be judged at the end of the age pertain specifically to such acts of blasphemy, or Matthew might be generalising the specific case to show that evil speech of any kind will be subject to judgment in the eschaton.

3.5 Parables of Judgment (Matt 13)

All of the parables contained in Matt 13.1-53 have a dual timeframe, that relates an initial action and certain outcomes that arise as a result of those actions. With the parable of the sower and its interpretation (Matt 13.1-23) the fourfold outcomes are realised after the sown seed has sprouted. These outcomes although future, are not clearly described in eschatological terms. The same is true of the twin parables of the mustard seed (Matt 13.31-32) and the leaven (Matt 13.33). The progress of time is essential to the parabolic meaning – the mustard seed grows into a large plant, and the leaven increases the size of the dough. Both images speak of futurity, but do not necessarily evoke eschatological perspectives. Again the hidden treasure (Matt 13.44) and the pearl (Matt 13.45-46) both require the passage of time in the parabolic narrative for the comparison to work. If these parables came to Matthew as a pair, then there is nothing that would suggest that their original context was evoking eschatological imagery.

However, in the current Matthew context there are two Matthean parables that both occur with interpretations – the tares (Matt 13.24-30, 36-43) and the dragnet (13.47-50), where the material is clearly eschatological in orientation. That eschatological perspective may have been intended to colour the notions of the future in the other parables in this chapter. However, for the sake of precision in analysing Matthew's eschatological understanding it is best to limit the discussion to the material where themes of future judgment are clearly and uncontestably intended.

In relation to the parable of the tares, the evangelist's eschatological framework is most clearly articulated in the interpretation to the parable (Matt 13.36-43). The strongly dualistic perspective comes to the fore once again. The good seed represents the sons of the kingdom, the tares are the sons of the evil one. Matthew presents the appearance of the tares as being due to Satanic activity since the devil sows the tares (Matt 13.39). This contrasts with the work of the Son of Man, who sows the good seed (Matt 13.37). The dichotomies between the good seed and the tares, the sons of the kingdom

²³ As Davies and Allison note in relation to Matt 12.36, 'Whether this line and the next are redactional cannot be decided. Perhaps Matthew took the verses from the oral tradition (M).' W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. I, commentary on Matthew VIII – XVIII, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 350.

and the sons of the evil one, and the work of the Son of Man and the work of the devil, comes to its climax in the description of the final judgment in Matt 13.40-43. Far greater space is devoted to the fate of those identified with the tares. They are to be burned with fire at the end of the age (Matt 13.40), the angels will remove those who are stumbling blocks or who commit lawlessness (Matt 13.41), and they will be cast 'into the furnace of fire; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt 13.42). By contrast, the fate of the righteous is described more simply and in far less florid terms: 'they shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father' (Matt 13.43). France notes in relation to the phrase 'the end of the age' which signals the time of coming reckoning that 'its specific concern is with the judgment which concludes the present age and determines people's status for the age to come.'²⁴

The interpretation of the parable of the dragnet is linked to the interpretation of the tares by the identical concluding statements to describe the fate of the wicked whom the angels will gather, 'and will cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall be there weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Matt 13.42//Matt 13.50).²⁵ Similarly, Matt 13.49 is a recasting of Matt 13.40b-41a using much of the same terminology:

Matt 13.41	Matt 13.49
οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος· ἀποστελεῖ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου τοὺς ἁγγέλους αὐτοῦ, καὶ συλλέξουσιν ἐκ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ	οὕτως ἔσται ἐν τῇ συντελείᾳ τοῦ αἰῶνος· ἐξελεύσονται οἱ ἄγγελοι καὶ ἀφοριοῦσιν τοὺς πονηροὺς ἐκ μέσου τῶν δικαίων

While the opening statements are identical, Matt 13.41 emphasises the role of the Son of Man in sending the angels to gather 'all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness'. By contrast, in Matt 13.49 the angles simply 'come forth' and the evil are taken 'from the midst of the righteous', rather than being 'gathered out from his kingdom' (Matt 13.41). In both of these closely related parables, the final judgment is a time of final and binary division in which the righteous and the unrighteous are separated. Moreover, it is the time when they will receive their respective reward or punishment. There is an element of finality and absolute decision in this last reckoning, and this has eternal consequences for both groups.

3.6 The Coming of the Son of Man (Matt 16.27-28; 19.28-29)

Both Matt 16.27-28 and Matt 19.28-29 speak of the coming of the Son of Man, perhaps with greater emphasis on the benefits that the coming will bring for those who believe in him. The first of these passages is more ambiguous or neutral in this regard. It speaks of the Son of Man coming 'in the glory of his father with his angels' (Matt 16.27). At that time, employing the near verbatim words of LXX Ps 61.13,²⁶ it is stated that καὶ τότε ἀποδώσει ἑκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν πρᾶξιν αὐτοῦ (Matt 16.27b). While in this passage there is no dualism in terms of the fates that await different people, it appears that the final judgment is being described. Judgment occurs for all people, and it is dispensed by the returning Son of Man who comes 'with the angels'. This aligns with the other descriptions in Matthew's Gospel of the final judgment (cf. Matt 13.39-40, 49; 24.31; 25.31). Given that the description in Matt 16.27 relates to the eschaton, it is natural to infer the same temporal context for the continuation of this pericope in the following verse. As the Matthean Jesus continues speaking, he declares, 'there are some standing here who will

²⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 535.

²⁵ 'This verse repeats exactly the wording of v. 42. Here there is quite a long bridge to cross from throwing the useless back into the sea and disposal in an oven.' Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 569.

²⁶ For a discussion of the form of this citation see D.A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, WBC 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995) 485.

not taste death until the Son of Man coming in his kingdom' (Matt 16.28). While it is natural to read this as a further description of the eschatological return of the Son of Man, many have resisted this natural reading. The theological difficulty is well-known, the return of the Son of Man did not take place prior to the death of any of those to whom Jesus was speaking. Thus France states, 'the immediate context suggests another possibility which perhaps better suits the surprising phrase "some of those standing here."'27 In this vein, France understands the prediction as finding its fulfilment in the Matthean narrative in the transfiguration story that follows immediately (Matt 17.1-8). While various commentators have seen this material as finding its fulfilment in the transfiguration narrative, all the indicators in Matt 16.27-28 point to the eschatological period. The statements in Matt 16.28 are closely tied to the preceding verse, and there the timeframe is that of 'the consummation of the present age and the coming of the eschaton proper with its concomitant blessing and judgment.'28 So while this verse only gives a brief description of the eschaton, it envisages it as being inaugurated by the return of the Son of Man, who is accompanied with angels, and ushers a period of judgment for humanity as a whole.

The second related passage describing the coming of the Son of Man speaks more clearly of the blessing and status that the twelve will enjoy in the eschatological kingdom. Matthew uses a term that is unique in the canonical gospels when he describes the eschatological future as the *παλιγγενεσία*, 'regeneration' (Matt 19.28; cf. Titus 3.5). In this future period the twelve are promised that when the son of man is enthroned in glory, they too 'will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt 19.28). It is commonly agreed that Matthew has heavily reworked an underlying Q saying and by so doing has introduced his own eschatological perspectives. In particular, the detail *ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ* (Matt 19.28) appears to be an addition made to the source by the evangelist.²⁹ Moreover, this phrase is closely paralleled in other unique Matthean material. In the opening to the judgment scene in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25.31-46), the last reckoning commences with the arrival of the Son of Man.

Matt 19.28	Matt 25.31
ὅταν καθίσῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ	Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῇ δόξῃ αὐτοῦ καὶ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι μετ' αὐτοῦ, τότε καθίσει ἐπὶ θρόνου δόξης αὐτοῦ.

The additional detail in Matt 19.28 is less fulsome than the scene-setting description in Matt 25.31. However, the similarity presents a strong coherence in Matthew's understanding of how the judgement will take place. One key difference is that in the thrones saying the disciples are pictured as having a specific role in judging the twelve tribes of Israel. By contrast, in the parable of the sheep and goats the judgment that is envisaged is universal in scope and is carried out by the Son of Man alone without assistance from the twelve.

3.7 Matthew's Eschatological discourse (Matt 24-25)

The fifth and final discourse in the Gospel of Matthew is seen as encompassing the material in Matt 23-25.³⁰ However, within that material several scholars have noted a split between the sections that deal with the woes to the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23.1-36), the lament over Jerusalem (Matt 23.37-39) and the prediction of the Temple's destruction

²⁷ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 641.

²⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 485.

²⁹ Fleddermann, *Q – A Reconstruction and Commentary*, 868.

³⁰ B.W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew* (London: Constable, 1930).

(Matt 24.1-2), in comparison to the material that follows.³¹ The material in Matt 24.4-44 is in direct response to the disciples double question posed in Matt 24.3, 'tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?' France finds a neat division in Jesus' response. He argues that '[Matt] 24:4-35 is concerned with the destruction of the temple ... and that the second question about the *parousia* comes only into the frame with the new beginning in 24:36.'³² While France's separation of sections is a helpful heuristic tool, it appears the topics of temple destruction and *parousia* are mixed to some degree in the section Matt 24.4-35. The discourse is rounded out with four parables that illustrate different aspects of the eschatological age and final judgment.

In this section there is much repetition of the key eschatological ideas in gospel. The appearance of false prophets (Matt 24.11) and the rise of lawlessness (Matt 24.12), both reprise ideas that were present in close connection in the closing section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 7.15, 23), where they are presented as causes for rejection by the Lord on the day of judgment (Matt 7.23). The theme of false prophets or false Christs is repeated in this section of the discourse (Matt 24.24) again picking up those earlier references in the gospel. This unit also anticipates the climax of the gospel (Matt 28.19-20) with its statement that a prior condition which must be fulfilled before the end of the age is that 'the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come' (Matt 24.14). As Davies and Allison observe, 'Christian mission belongs to eschatology. Indeed the conjunction of vv. 13 and 14 produces the thought that those who endure the eschatological trial are precisely those who, whatever comes, remain faithful bearers of "the gospel of the kingdom"'.³³ However, in both Matt 24.14 and 28.19-20, the missionary task of disciples, which is to be directed towards the gentiles, is an activity that acts as a precursor to the end of the age. Matthew also notes the intensity of the tribulation that precedes the end of the age. This tribulation will not be like anything that has been known 'since the beginning of the world until now' (Matt 24.21), and even the 'elect' would not endure unless the period of tribulation had been foreshortened (Matt 24.22).

In the second part of the double question the disciples asked Jesus specifically concerning 'the sign of your coming'. This was the first time the term *παρουσία*, 'coming', is employed in the gospel. Later in this chapter, the Matthean Jesus employs the same term three times in responding to that aspect of the disciples' question. First he describes the form of the coming of the self-referential Son of Man. Jesus states the *παρουσία* will be like the phenomenon of lightning and it will come 'from the east and flashes even to the west' (Matt 24.27). This image communicates both the suddenness of the appearance and its all-encompassing nature since it covers the total extent of the sky.³⁴ The ideas of suddenness and the unexpected nature of the *παρουσία* occur also in the other two uses of the term in this chapter. Both occur in connection with the comparison of the *παρουσία* with the Noahic flood. The first occurrence in this context simply sets up the comparison, 'the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah' (Matt 24.37). The second occurrence explains the thought behind the comparison, 'they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away, thus also will be the coming of the Son of Man' (Matt 24.39). There is an implied dualistic fate here which is

³¹ For instance R. T. France appears to separate Matt 24.3-25.46 more radically from Matt 23.1-24.2, calling Matt 24.3-25.46 the discourse on the future. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 889.

³² France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 890.

³³ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. III, 343.

³⁴ Hagner notes the same dual ideas communicated by the image of lightning. He speaks of the 'unmistakeable clarity and suddenness' of lightning. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 706.

implied through knowledge of the story of the ark, between those who were swept away by the flood and those who survived in the ark. That implicit dualism finds explicit statement in what follows. The image of two men in the field (Matt 24.40) and two women at the mill (Matt 24.41) both present the same scenario – one taken and one left. In light of nineteenth century dispensationalist views of ‘the rapture’ it has been understood that the ones taken are taken away into heaven. Not only does the text not describe the location to where the missing are taken, the idea that those taken experience the positive judgment does not cohere with the material that comes before these two verses. Those who are swept away in the flood are the ones who suffer the judgment of God, while those who remain in the ark are the righteous. However, if the image of the men in the field and the women at the mill is governed by the earlier statement in Matt 24.31, then it might be that readers are to understand the taken ones to be those gathered by the angels.³⁵ In truth, the text does not make its meaning entirely clear at this point. Regardless of which group is privileged, the image is one of final separation, which aligns with Matthew’s wider understanding of an absolute and dualistic scheme of punishment.

The eschatological discourse continues with four reasonably lengthy parables: the good and the evil servants (Matt 24.45-51), the ten virgins (Matt 25.1-13), the talents (Matt 25.14-30), and the sheep and the goats (Matt 25.31-46). All relate to the eschatological material in the previous section, and all describe, albeit using different images, a time of final reckoning. The parable of the good and evil servants picks up the preceding notion of not knowing the time of return (Matt 24.36, 43-44) with its statement that master ‘will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know’ (Matt 24.50). The parable of the ten virgins repeats that theme of the unexpected return (Matt 25.13). Its separation of the wise and foolish virgins, also results in the latter group being left outside. In language reminiscent of Matt 7.21-23, the foolish virgins appeal to the bridegroom using the double vocative κύριε κύριε, ‘Lord, Lord’ (Matt 25.11). To which the bridegroom responds ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, οὐκ οἶδα ὑμᾶς (Matt. 25:12). This response recalls the reply of Jesus to those accused of practicing lawlessness, ‘I never knew you, depart from me’ (Matt 7.23). Thus, in this parable, Matthew depicts the final judgment as a wedding scene where the wise enter into the feast with the bridegroom, but the foolish are left outside and are unknown by the groom. The third parable utilises a key Matthean phrase related to eschatological judgment as its finale. The slave who fails to make use of his one talent is cast out ‘into the outer darkness, in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt 25.30). Therefore, the first three of the four parables in this sequence all pick up and reuse key eschatological ideas that occur elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew.

The fourth parable in the sequence is the most explicit in terms of its future orientation and its eschatological perspectives. However, it may be questioned whether this pericope is so much a parable as it is an eschatological vision of the final judgment – albeit laden with images and metaphors. Thus Davies and Allison state, ‘[a]lthough reminiscent of the earlier parables of separation (13.24-30, 36-43, 47-50), this is not a parable but a “word-picture of the Last Judgment”’.³⁶ Similarly, Luz states, ‘[m]any people still refer to the text as the “parable of the judgment of the world.” However, in the usual sense of the term it is not a parable. ... A way out of the dilemma might be to

³⁵ For Luz it is self-evident that the taken ones are the elect. He states, ‘[w]ith “taken” (παραλαμβάνεται) the readers think of the taken away to the Lord of which they have just read (v. 31). With being left behind they think of the condition of being lost that comes from the final separation from God.’ U. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005) 214.

³⁶ Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. III, 418.

call Matt 25:31-46 a “depiction of judgment.”³⁷ In this depiction or vision of judgment ‘all the nations’ are gathered for judgment (Matt 25.32).

The scope of those subject to judgment immediately reveals that this is the final reckoning for all people. The separation into the two metaphorical categories of sheep and goats (Matt 24.33) is later seen as representing ‘the righteous’ (Matt 25.37) and the ‘accursed ones’ (Matt 25.41). Matthew does not depict the punishment of eternal fire as having been prepared directly for these accursed ones, but rather for the devil and his angels (Matt 24.41). Here, Matthew appears to have in mind accounts of intertestamental stories of the fall of the devil from heaven and the view that many of the angels aligned themselves with the devil (cf. Lk 10.18; Rev 12.9; also in the War Scroll the angels of light fight against Belial and the angels of darkness 1QM; see 4Q402; 11Q13). The language of the War Scroll is reminiscent of the conflict with the devil and his angels and the fate that awaits them. The author states that, ‘God’s great hand will subdue Belial and all the angels of his dominion’ (1QM 1.15). It is Belial who is described as accursed: ‘accursed be Belial in his malicious plan, may he be damned for his wicked rule’ (1QM 13.4). The fate that awaits Belial and his followers is described in the following terms, ‘you created Belial for the pit, angel of enmity; his domain is in darkness, his counsel is for evil and wickedness. All the spirits of his lot, angels of destruction, walk in the laws of darkness’ (1QM 13.11). Similarly, in the Gospel of Matthew, for the accursed ones the punishment is described as going away into eternal fire and thus sharing the fate of the devil and his angels (Matt 25.41, 46).

By contrast, the righteous are invited to enter and to ‘inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ (Matt 25.34; cf. Matt 25.46). This invitation is made by the Son of Man sitting on his throne, who is here called ὁ βασιλεὺς ‘the king’ (Matt. 25.34). This title may recall the designation of Jesus as king in the infancy narrative (Matt 2.12). What is clear in this context is that the final assize does not only clarify the fates of the righteous and the accursed ones, it also reveals Jesus’ eschatological status as king and judge.³⁸

3.8 Eschatological Perspectives in the Passion and Resurrection Narratives

In the final section of the Gospel of Matthew (Matt 26-28) there are few references to eschatological events. Matthew’s additional phenomena following the rending of the Temple veil, which include an earthquake, splitting of rocks, the opening of tombs and the resurrection of the dead saints (Matt 27.51b-53), are best understood as a proleptic apocalyptic scene.³⁹ The assumed period of these events is after the crucifixion, and in the case of the dead saints coming out of their tombs this is reported as occurring after the resurrection of Jesus. These events are not part of the eschaton, although they do represent Matthew’s wider apocalyptic outlook.

However, in the final section of Matthew’s Gospel two short sayings of Jesus appear to describe events that will take place in the eschatological future. First, at his trial before the Sanhedrin, in response to the high priest’s demand for a statement of identity ‘tell us whether you are the Christ, the Son of God’ (Matt 26.63), Jesus’ answer is elusive. He states, ‘you have said it; however, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven’ (Matt 26.64). While no precise time is specified for these future events, given what has been stated

³⁷ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 264.

³⁸ On this point see Davies and Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. III, 433.

³⁹ Licona notes parallels in both Jewish and Roman literature and describes these additional events as ‘phenomenological language used in a symbolic manner.’ Michael R. Licona, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A New Historiographical Approach* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010) 552.

elsewhere in the Matthew's Gospel about the appearance of the Son of Man in the sky (Matt 24.27), readers would have understood this as a description of the coming of Jesus at his παρουσία.⁴⁰ It is obvious in the context that the high priest understands this Son of Man saying as a self-reference, for on the basis of this statement he declares Jesus to have committed blasphemy and in concord the Sanhedrin pronounce the sentence of death (Matt 27.65-66). Luz notes this connection as being the basis for the charge of blasphemy since the Sanhedrin 'experienced Jesus claim to sit at the right hand of God and to judge the world as Son of Man ... Jesus' self-revelation was simply an attack on God's singularity and therefore blasphemy.'⁴¹ Consequently, the reference to the coming of the Son of Man in this context is not primarily concerned with providing insight into the eschatological future. Rather, here the depiction of the παρουσία of the Son of Man is stated as a means by which Matthew can express his christological concerns. For the evangelist, Jesus is unequivocally the Son of Man who will sit at the right hand of the father, and who will come on the clouds to judge the nations. It is only at the eschaton that Jesus' true identity will be revealed to all humanity, including his inquisitors. Therefore, Jesus tells them that when they see his coming they will know his identity. So here the evangelist's eschatological perspectives and christological concerns coalesce and will both be seen to be correct when Jesus comes as Son of Man in his glory.

The second saying that describes the eschatological future in this section of the gospel is the climactic conclusion of the whole gospel. The risen Jesus concludes his words to the eleven with the promise καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος 'and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age' (Matt 28.20b). There is no description of the 'end of the age' here. Rather, this statement provides correction and comfort. The disciples are informed that they are not bereft of Jesus prior to his return at the end of the age. Without explaining the mechanism, the risen Jesus promises that he is always present with his followers. Turner states with respect to the expression 'the end of the age', that it 'clearly refers to the time of eschatological judgment and renewal at the conclusion of the present order.'⁴² However, here the focus does not fall on the eschatological future, but upon the intervening period when followers can be equally assured of the presence of the risen Jesus with them. The phrase συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος is unique to Matthew (Matt 13.39, 40, 49; 24.3; 28.20), and given the prior uses in the gospel, here also it calls to mind the final coming of the Son of Man.⁴³ In his final discourse, Jesus informed his hearers that when the Son of Man comes in all his glory, πάντα τὰ ἔθνη will be gathered before him for judgment (Matt. 25.32). This judgment is not necessarily condemnatory since in the interim period humanity will have the opportunity to respond positively to the message of Jesus proclaimed by his disciples. This is the basis for the expansive mission charge that calls on followers of Jesus make disciples of πάντα τὰ ἔθνη (Matt 28.19). This aligns with the promises to the gentiles in the longest of Matthew's formula citations: 'he shall proclaim justice to the gentiles ... and in his name the gentiles will hope' (Matt 12.18, 21). Hence prior to the eschaton, the disciples of Jesus are to act as his agents participating in an enlarged mission to all the nations. The purpose of such activity is so that the gentiles might themselves become disciples of the risen Jesus and may stand on the side of the righteous at the παρουσία of the Son of Man, when he will come to bring final justice for all humanity in his role as

⁴⁰ Luz also noted this connection with the eschaton. He states '[t]he second part of the saying takes up Dan 7:13 LXX. The readers read it in terms of Matt 24:29-31, the text that deals with the eschatological coming of the Son of Man.' Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 429.

⁴¹ Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, 432.

⁴² Turner, *Matthew*, 690.

⁴³ See Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1271.

king and judge. Therefore, the Gospel of Matthew concludes with reference to the end of the age, and this coheres with Matthew's larger hope of an eschatological age when the renewed and purified disciples of Jesus will dwell with him for ever.

4. *Conclusions*

While there is a great concentration of eschatological language and themes in Jesus' final discourse in Matthew's Gospel (Matt 24-25) the theme of the end of the age, the final judgment, and the events that are immediate precursors to the παρουσία occur with significant frequency throughout the gospel narrative. In fact most of the five Matthean discourse contain at or near their end a series of eschatological descriptions and warnings. This point has been noted by a few scholars. Thus Turner states,

Eschatology appears in each of Jesus's first four discourses, especially at or near their conclusions (7:22; 10:32, 39-42; 13:49; 18:35), and so it is not surprising that Jesus ends *all* his teaching (Matt 26:1) in Matthew with eschatology.⁴⁴

A similar observation is made by Luz. Discussing the Sermon on the Mount, he notes that its conclusion 'is like the conclusion of almost all Matthean Discourses. They usually end by looking toward the judgment awaiting the community.'⁴⁵ While agreeing with these general observations, it should be noted that the time period of the punishment is not clearly articulated at the end of the fourth discourse, although the punishment is bleak with the master handing the slave 'over to the torturers' (Matt 18.34). Moreover, in this parabolic scenario a time of release is envisaged with the wicked slave being tortured until the debt is forgiven. Thus the theme of punishment by the heavenly father for lack of intra-group forgiveness is clearly stated, but in this context Matthew does not link the time of punishment with the end of the age. In the second discourse, treating instructions for mission, the clearest eschatological material occurs before the confessing and denying saying that Turner identifies (Matt 10.32-33). Instead, when discussing the future persecutions the Matthean Jesus announces that they will be curtailed at the time when 'the Son of Man comes' (Matt 10.22) and the reference to the day of judgment (Matt 10.15) demonstrates that there is an eschatological thread running throughout this entire discourse. Therefore, eschatology is a prominent concern in nearly all of Matthew's major discourses placed on the lips of Jesus.

The eschatological scheme that Matthew envisages is relative compact, but also largely consistent throughout the gospel. Prior to the return of Jesus, Matthew envisages a period of great challenge for his followers (Matt 24.22, 24). This time of tribulation will result in some who claimed to be Jesus' followers, being revealed as false claimants. Most typically such people are seen as being 'false prophets' (Matt 7.15; 24.11, 24). Another characteristic of this period is what Matthew describes as an increase of lawlessness (Matt 7.23; 13.41; 23.28; 24.12). Matthew never defines the term 'lawlessness', but in one of woes he contrasts the outward appearance of righteousness with the true inward disposition of the scribes and Pharisees who are 'full of hypocrisy and lawlessness' (Matt 23.28). Therefore, 'lawlessness' entails a failure to adhere to an internalised righteousness that adheres to Jesus' teaching on the ethical and correct life of discipleship. It also is strongly contrasted with those described as having a pretext of righteousness. Matthew links an increase in 'lawlessness' with a decrease in love (Matt 24.12).⁴⁶ While this period

⁴⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 611.

⁴⁵ Luz lists the following as the pertinent passages 'Matt 13:50: weeping and gnashing of teeth; 18:34-35; 24:49-50; 25.11-12, 24-28, 41-46 (in all these parables the negative figures are mentioned last). Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, 369 and 369 n. 2.

⁴⁶ EDNT, vol. 1, 106.

is seen as presenting intense challenge for the faithful, Matthew assures his readers that endurance of this period will be followed by the return of Jesus.

The second phase that Matthew envisages revolves around the return of the Son of Man. Regardless of the origins of this terminology,⁴⁷ there is little doubt that in these eschatological contexts it is used self-referentially in respect of Jesus. Among the canonical evangelists, Matthew alone uses the term *παρουσία*, 'coming' to describe the return of Jesus or 'the Son of Man'. This return can be depicted as the return of Son of Man with angels, whose role is to gather humanity. Sometimes this gathering involves the totality of humanity but in two separated groups (Matt 13.41-43, 49), while at other times the text refers only to the gathering of the elect (Matt 24.31). Either way, Matthew envisages a gathering of humanity that results in a strictly dualistic judgment. Matthew employs a number of images to depict this twofold judgment of humanity and this is a recurrent and consistent perspective throughout the gospel: wheat is gathered and chaff consumed with fire (Matt 3.12), tares separated from the good crop (Matt 13.40), good fish gathered and kept but bad fish tossed away (Matt 13.48), and sheep and goats separated for two opposing fates (Matt 25.31-46). In this scene Matthew's eschatology merges with his thorough-going christology. According to the perspectives of the first gospel, at his *παρουσία* the risen Jesus as the returning Son of Man will be the one who sits on a throne of glory to dispense eschatological justice. Thus the return of Christ is a moment of christological revelation for all the nations, when they will see Jesus both as final judge and heavenly king.

The third phase of Matthew's eschatology presents scattered description of the future state that the disciples of Jesus will experience. They are told that in the future kingdom they will recline with the Patriarchs (Matt 8.11). That notion is reinforced with the image of the wedding banquet in which the wise participate, but from which the foolish are excluded (Matt 25.10-12). The righteous are also told that they will 'shine as the sun' (Matt 13.43) when they enter the eschatological kingdom, and that they will enter eternal life (Matt 25.46). Moreover, the Twelve are told specifically of their special role, they 'shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Matt 19.28). No concern is expressed in this context about the number being reduced because of the actions of Judas. Matthew gives least details in his eschatological scenario concerning the benefits or blessings that will be enjoyed by the faithful followers of Jesus.

In essence Matthew's eschatological material has a dual purpose. It is fundamentally part of his christology. It presents Jesus as heavenly king and judge. Secondly, it is motivational for the life of discipleship. Here Matthew emphasises in greater detail the negative picture of future judgment over the more positive vision of eschatological judgment. Avoidance of punishment and ensuring that one takes the narrow way (Matt 7.13-14) and is not numbered among these whose love grows cold (Matt 24.12) are ways of encouraging followers of Jesus to persevere to the end of the age. Matthew, like all followers of Jesus, did not have first-hand experience of the end of the age. For that reason he resorts to images and parables to depict it. He conceives the eschaton as resulting in dualistic fates, and he is certain that one is to be avoided at all costs. The other can only be enjoyed by remaining faithful to the pattern of discipleship as set out by the Matthean Jesus.

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⁴⁷ For an overview of the issues involved see Maurice Casey, *The Solution to the 'Son of Man' Problem* LNTS 343 (London: T&T Clark, 2007).